



TRAINING THE COMPANY XO

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A company commander's success as a leader and manager is directly related to his efficiency in using his key subordinates. Of that group of leaders, the executive officer (XO) and the first sergeant may be the most essential. Since these two are often his most experienced assistants, they can support him in setting the standards for his unit. More important, they can enable him to command the company well by relieving him of the onerous, but necessary, details of company administration.

A new first sergeant may already be well trained to handle his duties on the basis of his previous assignments, but a new XO's level of training may be another matter. Although a junior lieutenant who is moved into the XO's job may have good leadership and tactical skills, these may not have prepared him for the job as the commander's primary officer assistant. But how does a company commander go about training his new officer to be the very best XO possible? A methodical training program may prove quite valuable.

If you are a company commander, I would like to address you directly as a planner, a role model, an instructor, and a

mentor. In training a new executive officer, you will play all of these roles.

First, before jumping into a training program, make an estimate of this officer's skills, strengths, and weaknesses. If he is from a line platoon, you may already be familiar with his ability and potential. But if he is a complete stranger to you, you will need to discover all the necessary information about him from his previous commander, or from a thorough review of his past assignments and schooling.

You need to understand his character traits too—his virtues and vices—because they will affect his sense of loyalty, responsibility, and selflessness. Since his approach to his duties may well produce excellence or mediocrity for your command, you will need to be careful in your evaluation.

Consider the full implications of developing the XO's character. FM 22-100 may help you with the specific traits or virtues to instill in him. For example, the ethics of the Army may be a convenient starting place. These days, loyalty to the Constitution and the rule of law is no trivial matter to be assumed. Loyalty to the unit, responsibility, and self-

less service all should be the foundation of exemplary ethical service. These criteria provide the broad limits within which moral decisions may be made by all soldiers.

Character traits represent the strengths of a person's moral responsibility—well-formed habits that dispose him to act properly as an officer and as a person. Good leadership and management depend on the strength and direction of these habits. FM 22-100 briefly discusses their contribution to successful leadership, and by assessing the areas you consider essential for the unit, you will establish the standard for ethical conduct. True, these areas are evaluated on the Officer Efficiency Report, but punitive measures should not be your primary concern. Rather, you should use them as the ethical framework for steering the XO's professional conduct in a manner consistent with national values and public expectations. Making him an excellent officer should be viewed as both a professional and a civic duty.

When it comes to technical knowledge, the XO's officer basic course and his previous assignments probably have not prepared him for the wide range of duties you will hand over to him. This deficiency should be remedied immediately because, not only should you be concerned with making him an expert as your XO and second-in-command, he could be your replacement when your command tour ends. You can leave behind no finer testimony of your tenure of command than a well qualified officer as your successor.

In developing his training program, however, do not overestimate his abilities. Review the tasks you will expect him to perform and then match the man to the task. If necessary, prepare a written checklist for him.

METHOD

He will need a systematic method of assembling and retaining the mass of information he will acquire. You might provide him with a green-covered register book for his daily record and references. In it he should record your guidance, his duties, a list of recurring suspenses, points of contact, a list of publications, and any other tips and information that can help him. The book can also serve as a workbook in which he can record notes from meetings, observations, inspections, and other necessary information. The journal should become for him a living document, his job book, and he should use it until it is full. (In the beginning, he may use it as a crutch, but he will soon be able to use it simply as a briefing book and memory aid. You may want to inspect his book occasionally.)

Once you feel comfortable with your preparations, schedule a mission briefing and give him a general overview of his responsibilities in the unit. Explain to him that his instruction will be conducted continuously, with "school" being held every day. Remind him that he will be an active student, conducting readiness inspections of the unit's vehicles and reconciling property receipts. He will also be a passive student as he witnesses your non-judicial punishment sessions and award presentations. His textbook will be the journal he keeps.

You should make arrangements for him to go to battalion headquarters for a series of staff briefings. Ask each staff sec-

tion to give him a short but informative overview of the various duties that section performs. These briefings should be spread out over several days so that he does not become swamped. You might consider attending the briefings with him so that both of you will receive the same information.

Direct the first sergeant to schedule information and inspection tours of the company facilities. During the tours, the unit staff NCOs can present the respective NBC, supply, and communications rooms in inspection order. This enables the new XO to become knowledgeable about their strengths and weaknesses. With your assistance, the XO can use the information gleaned from the battalion staff briefings to check on potential unit weaknesses. This process also provides the XO with increasing legitimacy as the supervisor of the staff NCOs and builds confidence in the XO's ability to cope with the broad range of his duties.

No training program will be complete without support from available reference materials. Direct the XO to visit the battalion reference library so that he can become intimately familiar with its potential usefulness. The staff briefings should provide him with the publications, regulations, manuals, and pamphlets that will be most important to him as he supervises his areas. In the reference portion of the journal, he should compile a list of these publications for future use. If copies of these materials cannot be maintained in the unit, he should note their location so that he or his subordinates can find and refer to them.

DIRECTED STUDY

Consider starting a directed study program to test his ability to maneuver through these publications. Select a few topics in the field of administration, maintenance, or logistics. Require him, for example, to research the procedures for separations under the provision of AR 635-200. On an appropriate suspense date, have him orally brief you on the information. Requiring him to prepare a complementary memorandum on the subject might be a useful way to test his writing skills as well.

A study program of this kind will force him to come to grips with the regulations. More important, you will be molding into his character a certain courage for tackling the demands of the Army's bureaucracy. That confidence will be worth a great deal as he handles the complex and sometimes confusing administrative regulations that affect your unit's readiness.

All of this theoretical and pedagogical preparation will be of little benefit, however, without some performance training. Selecting a time for synthesizing that knowledge and a practical exercise will depend upon the unit's mission and the XO's individual progress.

When the proper time arrives, have him conduct a logistics exercise. Give him the time he needs to conduct his own troop leading procedures so that he can accomplish a certain difficult but finite mission (such as an equipment readiness and accountability inspection). Give him a mission order complete with tasks, conditions, and standards. Have him go through the entire planning and execution process as if he had received a similar directive from battalion headquarters in preparation

for a special inspection. The completed action would require an estimate, allocation of time and personnel, rehearsals, utilization of key subordinates, and continuous supervision. Either you or the battalion commander could act as the inspecting officer.

In doing an exercise of this kind, the XO will have to put his raw skills into practical action, and the inspection will give you a first-hand opportunity to gauge his capabilities. In the process, weaknesses may be disclosed that provide the agenda for your tutoring, which can lay the foundation for furthering the character development process. The XO will gain increased expertise and confidence, and you will gain a competent assistant.

One way to see that he becomes totally aware of the full scope of company operations is to immerse him in all essential duties. The XO can then complement the first sergeant in supporting you. The exact mix of duties and responsibilities will vary from officer to officer. You may vary the range of duties assigned to a new XO based upon your unit's situation, but keep in mind the needs of both the individual and the unit when assigning his duties.

Be careful that you do not limit his responsibilities to only a few duties, for this would be doing a disservice to both of you. One word of caution: Clearly delineate the responsibilities allocated to the first sergeant and the XO. Some overlap may be desirable so long as no severe jurisdictional conflicts are likely to arise from it.

GARRISON DUTIES

In garrison, the XO can operate as your primary support operator, fireman, and eyes and ears. In preparing for training exercises, he can cross-check the coordination for training support for ranges, road marches, vehicle maintenance, medical support, and extra-battalion support. This support might include requisitioning several echelons of support—Classes I, III, V, VII, and VIII supplies; requisitioning medical aidmen; providing reference materials and maps; researching training and range areas; and planning routes. He can resolve high priority problems ranging from expediting discharges and bars to reenlistment to supervising platoon movements or training sessions. Finally, he can serve as another conduit of privileged information for you so that incipient problems can receive proper command attention.

Supporting the company includes a wide range of responsibilities. To preclude jurisdictional conflicts between the XO and the first sergeant, you might consider forming a headquarters platoon. Command and control of the functional aspects of logistical support would be the XO's responsibilities. The senior headquarters sergeant could operate as the XO's platoon sergeant and be responsive to the first sergeant for routine NCO business. That platoon sergeant would be responsible for accountability and caring for the soldiers in the platoon. In this manner, a cohesive, responsive, professional headquarters might be formed.

The XO should visit the company work areas at least every other day. Section sergeants should brief him daily on the sec-

tion's activities. A coordination meeting might be held each day to review the priorities for that day. The XO should conduct monthly logistics meetings with the headquarters platoon to review the upcoming company operations. You might also attend this meeting, which should parallel the training meeting, to cross-check the essential support missions for the headquarters. The XO should be aware of all current and pending operations so he can ensure that company training will always be supported. No equipment transfer or loss that might adversely affect training should escape his notice. All such problems should be noted in his journal so that he can brief you later.

In the process of providing support, he should assemble in his journal the working status of the company's key vehicles and weapons. He might develop a miniature version of the briefing chart in his office that outlines the current operational status for weapons (machineguns, TOWs, mortars), radios, and vehicles. The status board might include other useful data for handy reference:

- Calibration schedules.
- Lubrication schedules.
- Equipment readiness status.
- NBC service schedules.
- Equipment transfers and projections.
- Drivers' testing and licensing.
- Assigned drivers
- Furnishings accountability.
- Self-Service Supply account status.

He should maintain a similar chart in your office.

This information will be useful, however, only if it is accurate and fresh. If necessary, the XO should contact each battalion staff section on a daily basis to keep current in these areas as well as in the status of his various additional duties. You may also want him to be vigilant in the areas shown in Table 1.

S-1/ MEDICAL PLATOON	S-2
Accident reports Discharge packets Award packets Personal deployment readiness folders	CEOI security Key and lock inventories Guard duty coordination Building security Deployment security
S-3	S-4/MAINTENANCE
Training area/range area requests Training records Ammunition requests Key weapon readiness	Property accountability Hand receipts Equipment transfers Expendable items Vehicular maintenance Deployment logistics Driver training

Table 1

Your continued checking at this stage is vital in keeping the new XO on the right track. It will probably be necessary to have him back-brief you daily so that you can follow his progress and suggest solutions in the interest of saving time.

Planning exercises for him will be useful in developing his

skills, but this should not be the end of your active involvement. Whenever possible, have him witness various personnel actions as you handle them. Ask him for his opinion on what course of action to take on a discharge, for example. Allocate some time to explain the justification for your own action so that he can better understand your method of command. After all, he will be acting commander when you are on leave, and you would not want any discontinuity during your absence. Letting him witness your training meetings, letters of admonition, promotions, counseling sessions, and especially non-judicial punishments will give him invaluable experience.

Use your suspense chart as a conceptual framework for discussing recurring suspenses. Daily coordination should emphasize your priorities on the matters that urgently need attention and on those that are merely important. Quiz him on his plans for attacking an issue, having him always find the best course of action.

Your training of the XO should not obscure his own duty to train his headquarters platoon, because these soldiers must be just as ready to perform in the field as those in the line platoons. Give him a slice of time in your training meetings to plan individual and collective training for his sections.

Direct him to plan occasional headquarters training exercises in the company area that will burnish the field skills of his platoon. During support cycles, the headquarters platoon could set up a command post in the areas adjacent to the company area and could perform the usual activities from a tent instead of the supply room. Communications personnel could lay a landline to the company, test equipment, and maintain equipment in a simulated field environment. Other personnel could practice radio telephone procedures for jamming, encoding, decoding, and journal keeping. Various training activities—camouflage, passive NBC defense, small arms defense against aircraft, radio operator procedures, antenna construction, among others—could easily be incorporated into the exercise.

If the XO has done his job well, the company should be well prepared to head to the field training area. Once in the field, employ him as your primary logistical operator. While the first sergeant handles personnel and weapons accountability and Class I resupply, you might allocate supply and maintenance responsibilities to the XO. Some of these areas may include those shown in Table 2.

When possible, cut him loose from his logistical tasks by replacing him with another lieutenant (to start the process anew with his potential replacement). Employ the XO as your stand-in during tactical exercises, and have him accompany you to

the orders briefings so that he can better see the "big picture." Let him perform the leader's reconnaissance and route planning, and have him select an assembly area site and prepare

S-1/MEDICAL PLATOON	S-2
Ambulance support	CEOI security Maps
S-3	S-4/MAINTENANCE
Weapon readiness Weapon qualification Range coordination Route planning	Class III, V, VII Water Trash collection Contact teams Transportation

Table 2

the actual movement plan. As his mentor, also allow him to prepare and deliver the operation order to the platoon leaders to give him a taste of command. If the situation permits, place him in actual control of the exercise.

The success of this procedure depends upon the XO's personal skills, which may have become a bit rusty since his last deployment to the field. Remind him through an occasional examination of his map reading or radio skills during the headquarters training exercises. His ability to respond to a field situation will again depend upon your mentoring in order for him to get the most from this training opportunity. He may have to assume command during an exercise or ARTEP; his tactical skills must not become impaired because he has misunderstood the priorities.

The utility of this training program may seem obvious to many who have been involved in similar situations. We often have the best intentions in executing training but may, unfortunately, become overwhelmed by events to the point of procrastinating and doing shoddy work. A training program such as this, with its standards and objectives, can help a commander rise to the challenge.

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